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SUBJECT: TURKEY PREPARING TO REVIVE EU REFORMS IN 2008

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Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b),(d)
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11. (C) Summary and comment: The EU's December 19 decision to open negotiations with Turkey on two new policy chapters appears to have calmed GOT officials infuriated by French President Sarkozy's maneuvering to have the terms "accession" and "membership" removed from the GAERC's December 10 statement. The "watered-down" final version of Sarkozy's "Wise Men Committee" is also helping Turkish officials focus on launching a wave of domestic reforms in 2008 that will enable the Slovenian Presidency to open at least two additional chapters. Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin's recent statement that Parliament will take up amendment of Penal Code Article 301 (which criminalizes insulting "Turkishness") within two weeks is a positive sign. The pace of reforms ultimately will be determined by resolution of the current PKK crisis and the priorities PM Erdogan sets in the new year. The GOT must carry its share of the EU accession burden by launching the revitalized reform process Erdogan promised after the July parliamentary election. End summary and comment.

Negotiations Opened on Two Chapters

12. (SBU) Turkey's EU Secretariat Political Chief Cem Kahyaoglu told us the EU's December 19 decision to open negotiations on two new policy chapters -- Trans-European Networks (chapter 21) and Consumer and Health Protection (chapter 28) -- would help Turkey move beyond its frustration with French efforts to thwart Turkey's full membership. It would also help quell disappointment that the EU provisionally has opened and closed only one chapter -- Science and Technology -- since negotiations began in 2005. In the same period, by contrast, the EU opened and closed 14 chapters for candidate Croatia. Kahyaoglu is cautiously optimistic that by continuing to open new chapters, the EU will help alleviate Turkish doubts over the EU's sincerity regarding Turkey's membership aspirations.

Sarkozy's Maneuvering Infuriates Turkey

13. (C) French President Sarkozy had "insulted" the GOT and

Turkish public by insisting the EU remove the terms "accession" and "membership" from the December 10 General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) statement, Kahyaoglu told us. The GOT responded in a December 14 press statement: "The main element underlying our disappointment is the efforts of one member state to erode the political and legal standing of our EU membership process. It is inevitable that such approaches and acts lacking in common sense will have adverse repercussions on Turkey-EU relations, as well as on our bilateral relations with the countries concerned." MFA Council of Europe Head of Department Hasan Ulusoy had hoped for a bolder statement. The generally-held view in the MFA, he said, is that the French and German governments' populist platforms are clouding their ability to develop rational policies on EU enlargement.

¶4. (C) Sarkozy had also frustrated Turkey by trying to include the topic of Europe's borders in the mandate of the so-called "Wise Men Committee," according to Kahyaoglu. Fortunately, the UK, Sweden, and others had pressured the French to accept a watered-down version of the original proposal. The GOT could live with the resulting "Reflection Group," due to its more limited agenda of preparing reports on issues such as energy, environment and terrorism. Both Kahyaoglu and Ulusoy predicted the body would become irrelevant within two or three years.

Turkey Looks Ahead to 2008

¶5. (C) The GOT has signaled its determination to move forward with the accession process, Kahyaoglu believes, despite the

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mixed messages from Europe that drove Turkish public support to drop to 49 percent from a high of 71 percent in 2004. FM Babacan told press following the recent opening of new chapters that despite "provocations," Turkey would not be deterred from its goal of nothing less than full membership. PM Erdogan had repeatedly announced AKP plans to launch a campaign of constitutional and legal reform in 2008.

¶6. (C) The military's cross-border operations into northern Iraq are likely to improve security in 2008, making the climate ripe for AKP to implement many long-promised reforms, Kahyaoglu said. Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin had given a positive signal when he told the press on December 26 that his ministry would submit to the Cabinet an amended version of controversial Penal Code Article 301 (criminalizing insulting "Turkishness") within 15 days. Sahin told the press that the amendment would require a prosecutor obtain MOJ permission prior to opening an investigation under the article and will replace "Turkishness" with "Turkish nation" and "Republic" with "State of the Republic of Turkey."

¶7. (C) The upcoming Slovenian Presidency could also provide a needed boost to Turkey's EU reform efforts, according to European Commission officials. EC Political officer Sema Kilicer told us the December signing of the Lisbon Treaty will allow the Slovenian presidency to re-focus the EU's attention on enlargement, and open at least two more chapters during its term. Both Kilicer and Kahyaoglu told us the French Presidency (July - December 2008) could paradoxically speed the pace of negotiations so that it appears impartial. They believe France could open as many as five new chapters, including: Energy; Monetary Policy; Education and Culture; Agriculture; and Institutions.

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